

# THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF YOUNG MEN'S INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF BESANT AS PORTRAYED BY *THE COMMONWEAL* AND *NEW INDIA*

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## ABSTRACT

*The Young Men's Association was started by Annie Besant to cultivate in the youth patriotic ideas, to inculcate the spirit of self-control, courtesy, helpfulness, sympathy with down-trodden, and to make brave, true and unselfish of coming generations. The newspapers The Commonweal and New India contributed to the National Movement like the spread of patriotic feelings through the Young Men's Indian Association.*

**KEYWORDS:** Association, Vernacular, Nationalist & Oppressive

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## INTRODUCTION

The role of various magazines and newspapers in the national movement. The English magazines and newspapers served as a tool in their own way promoting nationalism among the educated elites and the vernacular among the rural masses. Nationalism grew faster with the contribution of the press. In this chapter researcher will discuss social and political contributions of Mrs. Besant as explained by *The Commonweal* and *New India*.

“The activity of politics is about the control and organization of power in India, especially before the First World War, and it was vested exclusively in the alien government and its various local institutions. Before 1914 the government of India, on the whole, held the initiative”. The viceroy of India was considered the agent of the British government in India. Nationalist politicians, were forced to come together outside the existing constitutional machinery to attempt to direct the course of any reforms.<sup>1</sup> A study of the administrative history of India would reveal the fact that the press had played a commendable role in suggesting reforms in the sphere of administration. Papers like *The Hindu*, *Swadesamitran*, *Young India* and *Bala Bharatha* made it a point to write extensively on the administrative aspect of the British rule. They never hesitated to point out the drawbacks in the administrative machinery and also suggested ways and means of improving the same. *New India* of Annie Besant also belonged to that category. The paper expressed its views on the administrative policies adopted by the British. It also was bold and forthright in pin pointing the oppressive and exploitative nature of the British.

Mrs. Annie Besant was working for the awakening of the people by commenting upon popular grievances and possible remedies in her papers *The Commonweal* and *New India*.

From 1915 Annie Besant awakened the people from their miserable plight and prepared them sufficiently for launching the campaign for self-government from village councils, through District and Municipal Boards and Provincial Legislative Assemblies, to a National Parliament, equal in its powers to the legislative bodies of the self-governing colonies, by whatever name these may be called; also by the direct representation of India in the Imperial Parliament.

## YOUNG MEN'S INDIAN ASSOCIATION

Mrs. Annie Besant strongly felt that the nation should be shaped, guided and developed by the youth. The youth would be the future statesman, leaders, generals and admirals, merchants, scientists and the future rulers of India. In order to achieve this goal and to bring them into touch with older men of high ideals of pure life Mrs. Besant through *The Commonweal* and *New India* encouraged the establishment of the Young Men's Association. Mrs. Besant "favourite child" was founded on 11 January 1914. In the words of Vice President, T. V. Viswanatha Aiyar, its birth was "with Dr. Mrs. Besant, essentially an act of faith- the spiritual revival of the modern world through Indian thought of which the first step was the revival of India herself." This association helped the youth to be led by examples of patriotism and to be a service to the motherland through sacrifice.

The main object of the establishment of the Young Men's Association was made, it clear in her two newspapers. *The Commonweal* and *New India* were "to cultivate in the youth patriotic ideas, to inculcate the spirit of self-control, courtesy, helpfulness, sympathy with down-trodden, and to make brave, true and unselfish of coming generations." She felt that, it was equipped to provide systematic training for Indian youth to blossom into useful citizens. Self-confidence and helpfulness would flourish in such an atmosphere, and unconsciously youthful ambitions would be purified.

Another side of these associations was that they offered recreation of an attractive kind in pure surroundings. "A gymnasium should always be established as soon as possible, and fitted up with suitable apparatus. Some officers should be found to act as drill-master, and a trained Indian athlete to teach the indigenous exercises in addition to western methods". She suggested in *The Commonweal* that these associations should have recreation rooms for suitable games, reading rooms of ephemeral literature and a good library for study and reading with, suitable furniture they should arrange for debates and lectures. This Association should by no means be confined to students.

The young men who have left college or school, who were employed in government or other offices or banks, clerks who were educated but poor all these would find a home in such associations. As a staunch supporter of Young Men's Association, Mrs. Annie Besant gifted the Gokhale Hall in Madras for youth in 1925 and named it 'The Young Men's Indian Association'. She envisaged that an Indian youth should develop all his/her capacities and potentialities possible. These would include growth in physical, mental, psychological, intellectual and moral aspects. She contemplated an overall and integral growth of an Indian youth for which she made use of these newspapers *The Commonweal* and *New India*. She regularly explained these ideas and chalked out a programme of action. She even worked out the minute details such as a recreation room, gymnasium and so on. At the same time she also wanted to inculcate the patriotic spirit in them so that they would serve the country later by being responsible citizens of the country.

As stated by *New India*, membership of the Association in the year 1917, stood at 69. This represents the effective strength of the Association and did not take into account a good number of members who were in arrears and whose continuance in the membership register was a very doubtful factor. The managing committee was reluctant to remove their

names from the rolls as they still hoped that the members may see their way to continue to give to the Association the benefit of their active cooperation and support. As cited with *The Commonweal*, The members were divided into different sections according to their membership. Various classes of members enrolled in the Association.

The sum collected as subscription during the year was almost the same as in the 1917, being Rs. 3080 as compared with the year's collection of Rs.3151/-.

## CONCLUSIONS

The newspapers *The Commonweal* and *New India* contributed to the National Movement like the spread of patriotic feelings through the Young Men's Indian Association, Boy's Scouts Movement and, Madras Parliament. The papers served as powerful tools in forming the youngsters into nationalists who would work for the independence. The inspirational editorials and articles published in those papers helped the youth to cultivate a nationalistic spirit. The details given in the papers were useful in shaping their mindset towards the cause. Likewise the papers *The Commonweal* and *New India* also brought out many articles to eradicate the social evils as we have seen above. These newspapers, however insignificant they might be, gradually sharpened their vision and united them towards a common goal of Independence. These newspapers not only contributed to the political movements, but also uplifted the society as one unified and noble community.

Her novel initiative such as YMIA Parliament helped the youth of the times, to become leaders of the nation, to mould their personalities and their formation thus contributing to the nation in making them as responsible leaders. For such noble aims Mrs. Besant used the newspaper the *Commonweal* and *New India*. These papers through their publications enlightened the masses and brought the nationalists together. Her longing for independence helped her to channelize their energy for suitable activities for which she made to use these newspapers, *The Common weal* and *New India*.

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13. Class Strength: A 12 + B 53 + C 153 + D 269 = Total 487

*Class A: Life Members who pay not less than Rs.500, and shall not be liable to pay any entrance fee or monthly subscription.*

*Class B: Persons of 21 years and upwards, who should be liable to pay an entrance fee of Rs.25/- and a monthly subscription of Re. 1.*

*Class C: Teachers and public workers should be liable to pay only a monthly subscription of Re.1.*

*Class D 1: Students and others would be admitted according to such Rules and Bye-laws as may be framed by the Managing Committee.*

*Class D 2: Students would be admitted as members with a subscription of Rs. 2 per annum, payable half-yearly in advance. All others admitted to D 1 will pay a subscription of Rs.4 per annum, payable half-yearly in advance. Source: New India, 12 May, 1918.*

14. *The Commonweal, 21 February, 1915.*

15. *The Commonweal, 11 December, 1917.*